CHAPTER III: TRAIL USE, USER ATTITUDES, AND TRENDS

Introduction

Understanding trail use patterns is a key element in improving Montana's trail system. Exploring trail use patterns requires a comprehensive overview of current trail demand, including participation rates in various trail-related activities; trail and trail setting preferences; demographic characteristics of users; and trail user's attitudes on supply, conflict, compatibility of uses, new trails, and funding. Another important component in identifying state trail trends are national rates of participation in trail-related activities, as well as other pertinent cultural, economic, political, and technological variables.

The *Montana Trail Users Study* (1994b) and a Montana resident survey undertaken by the FWP (1998) are the primary sources of information on trail use and user attitudes at the state level. Other sources include recent editions of the *Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP), and USDA Forest Service visitation and outdoor recreation reports.

The *Montana Trail Users Study* was the result of a survey conducted by The University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR), under contract with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP). The intent was to learn more about trail use and Montanans' attitudes towards a variety of trail issues. The ITRR's survey was divided into two parts, each with a sample size of 1,100. An initial summer use phase was mailed out in October 1993, inquiring about trail-related activities during the previous six months. A second phase was mailed out in April 1994 that dealt with winter trail activities. Both summer and winter surveys followed recommended social science survey procedures for reminders and follow up. For each phase, an additional telephone interview was conducted with a sample of non-respondents to adjust for non-response bias. The full report on survey results was completed in August 1994, and is available through the Institute or FWP's Parks Division upon request.

The ITRR survey determined participation rates for *trail-related activities*, which only indirectly correlates with rates of trail use. This was done by asking survey responders if they had engaged in these specific activities, not if they had engaged in these activities *on trails*. The survey then asks the responder what kind of ground surface and setting they prefer for their activity, which can be used to more specifically determine actual trail use.

FWP's *Montanan's Assessment of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Programs* (1998), on the other hand, utilizes an approach to estimating trail use that allowed the survey responder to decide themselves what constituted trails. This survey asked respondents if they had used a trail in a six month period, and if so, what activity they engaged in while on the trail. As a result, this survey estimated participation rates that in some cases varied from the ITRR survey. These two surveys broadened the scope of trail use beyond the definition of trail utilized in the trail inventory discussed earlier in this Plan.

Prior to getting into specifics about Montana trail users and use patterns, this chapter will look at some of the larger national trends affecting outdoor recreation and trail use.

National Trends Affecting Montana Trail Use

While long-range patterns are difficult to predict, a number of current trends suggest increased pressure on Montana's trail system. Both throughout the country and in Montana, an escalating population, growing numbers of tourists, and increasing rates of participation in outdoor recreation will likely mean more people using Montana's trails in the twenty-first century.

Outdoor recreation is exploding in popularity, with trail use and trail-related activities among the fastest growing. In 1995, over 94 percent of Americans participated in some form of outdoor recreation at least once, up from 89 percent in 1982-83 (Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997). An increased demand for inexpensive outdoor recreation, especially close to home and near urban centers, is contributing to an increased use of trails and demand for more trail opportunities (Leisure Watch Canada 1998).

Fitness-oriented sports such as in-line skating, mountain biking, hiking, walking, and jogging that can be done inexpensively and on short-notice are increasingly popular. For example, according to a national recreation survey, 67 percent of Americans went walking in 1996, while 30 percent went bicycling and 26 percent went jogging (see Figure III-1). Other activities ranged from a 14 percent participation rate for off-road driving, 8 percent for backpacking, seven percent for horseback riding, and 5 percent for cross-country skiing (Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997). While all of these activities don't always occur on trails, they frequently do.

Nationally, participation in trail-related outdoor recreation has increased dramatically. Hiking is among the fastest growing trail-related activities, with over 48 million participants in 1994, a 94 percent increase since 1989 (see Figure III-2). Backpacking gained 73 percent more participants during this period, with over 15 million Americans participating in 1994. Off-road driving grew by 44 percent, with nearly 28 million participants by 1994 (Widdekind 1995; Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997).

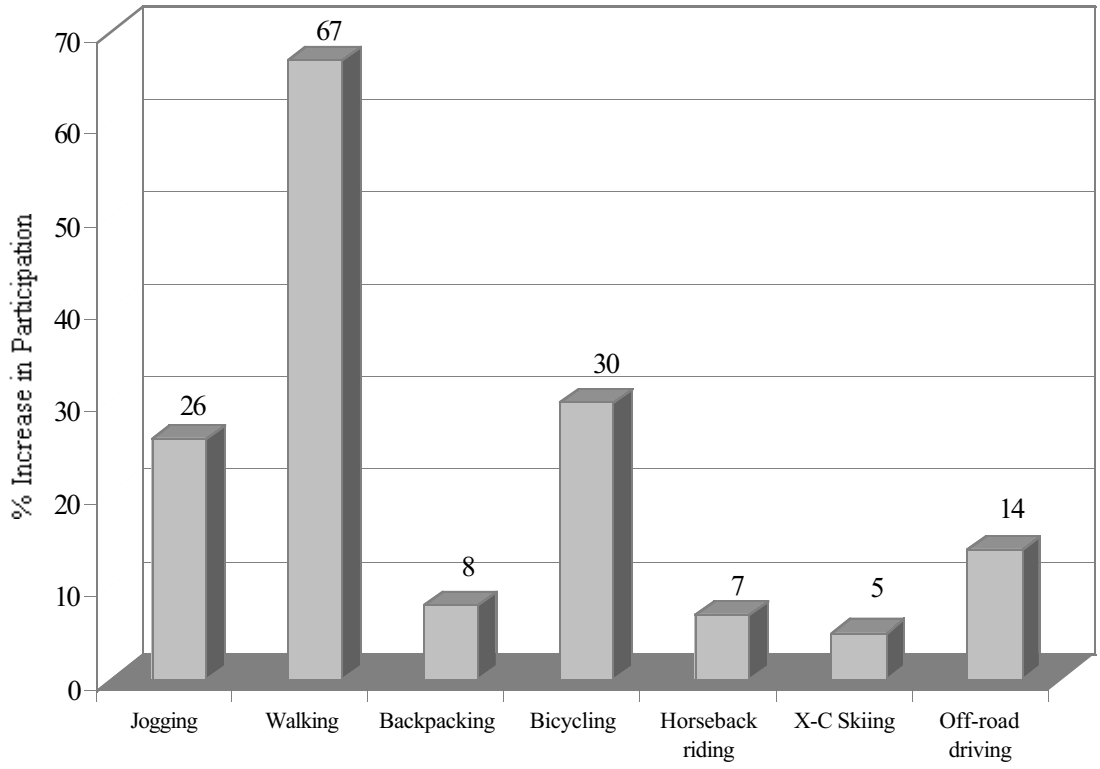
Bicycling, although among the most popular trail-related activities at the national level, grew at a slower rate then the uses mentioned above. Mountain bike riders, however, have grown by 20 percent per year since 1990, with more than 26 million Americans owning mountain bikes, including over two and a half million "avid" trail cyclists riding off-road nationwide by 1994 (Widdekind 1995). The popularity of mountain bikes today makes it easy to forget that they weren't even commercially available in large numbers until 1982. In-line skates, rapidly becoming as popular as bicycles, were also first mass marketed in the early 1980s.

Cross-country skiing was among the fastest growing sports in the country in the mid-1980s, but grew in popularity at a slower rate in the early 1990s. Horseback riding is the only major trail-related activity that saw actual declines in the number of participants between 1983 and 1994, from 16 million to 14 million (Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997).

Traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, and nature watching are other popular outdoor sports that often involve trail use. Slight declines in the numbers of hunters and anglers were more than made up by the 54 million Americans involved in bird watching by 1994, a 155 percent increase since 1982 (Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997).

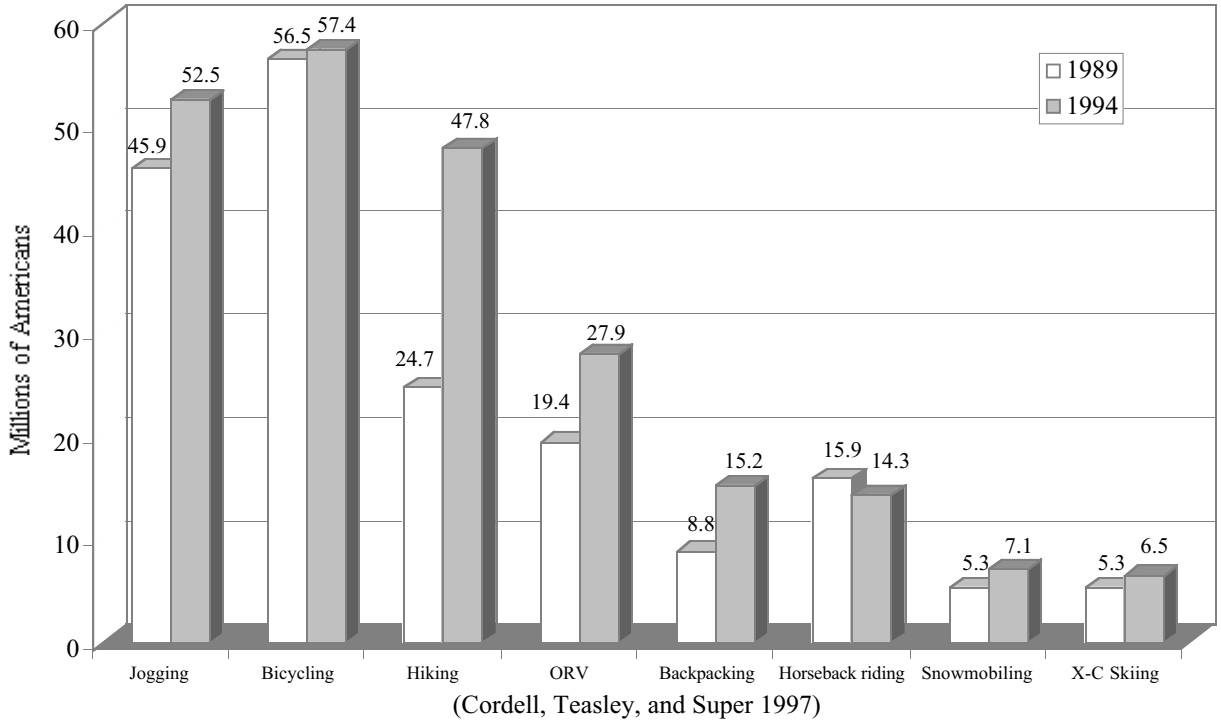
Nationwide trends that are already affecting Montana's trail system are a growing cultural propensity for outdoor adventure sports, and rapid technological advances in equipment. The proliferation of new sports, especially outdoor adventure sports, is seen as a direct extension of America's pioneering and inventive spirit, with the propensity for taking up new sports a growing phenomena (Thurow 1996). Sports such as rock climbing, ice climbing, and back country skiing and snowboarding are experiencing rapid gains in

Figure III-1: National Participation in Trail-Related Activities



(Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997)

Figure III-2. Trends in National Participation Rates for Trail-Related Activities.



(Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997)

participants, many of whom who use trails as travel routes to desirable locations. Improvements in old technologies and new forms of wheeled recreation could occur at even faster rates. For example, recumbent tricycles, which offer comfortable seating positions and stability, are likely to evolve and increase in popularity as the population ages (Nebraska Trails Plan 1994).

One method of gauging the growth in trail-related outdoor activities is by examining the sporting goods and off-road vehicle market. In 1994, 85 percent of outdoor equipment retailers nationwide showed an increase in sales volume (Widdekind 1995). This occurred while the sporting goods industry as a whole reported slow growth, with a decline in manufacturer's shipments for such sports as tennis and downhill skiing. The growth of the camping industry, on the other hand, has been explosive, with wholesale sales reaching $1.5 billion by 1995, an increase of 70 percent since 1989 (Teague 1996). There has been rapid growth in the sales of outdoor-adventure equipment, especially mountain bikes, in-line skates, snowboards and climbing equipment. Mountain bikes rank with golf clubs and bowling balls as the best selling sports equipment in the country.

The off-highway vehicle market has also experienced rapid growth, with $215 million in wholesale sales for off-road motorcycles and ATVs in 1992. By 1997 well over three million ATVs and off-road motorcycles were in use, with a 40 percent growth rate in the last decade (Lundquist 1997; The Economist 1997).

Advances in motorized technology have contributed to the popularity of off-road vehicles, especially ATVs. Increased climbing capability has been achieved through improved tires, power trains, and transfer cases (Chalsma 1994). The introduction of split-housing, aluminum transfer cases, and constant mesh gears have increased ease of operation while reducing noise and vibration (Diesel Progress Engines and Drives 1996). Locking differentials allow faster driving and better climbing over rough and steep terrain. Size and weight have been drastically reduced, and maneuverability increased in recent years. Improved suspension also allows driving on rougher terrain, increasing rider comfort. With the addition of skid plates and power winches, motorized vehicles can now go places that were impossible to reach without hiking only a few years ago.

Current trends are expected to hold well in to the twenty-first century. For example, hiking is predicted to be the fastest-growing trail activity, up 193 percent by 2040 (see Figure III-3). Backpacking is expected to grow by more than 155 percent by 2040, surpassing many existing uses in popularity. Conversely, horseback riding and off-highway vehicle use are expected to grow at slower rates, with OHV use growing by 30 percent by 2040 (English et al. 1996).

The presence of natural beauty and limited crowding are the two most important attributes given by Americans when choosing outdoor recreation areas (President's Commission on American Outdoors 1986). Montana is increasingly viewed by the nation as offering these amenities, a significant factor in both population growth and tourism. As population growth and associated development continue to make inroads into the natural world elsewhere in the country, the demand for the natural amenities offered by Montana will increase.

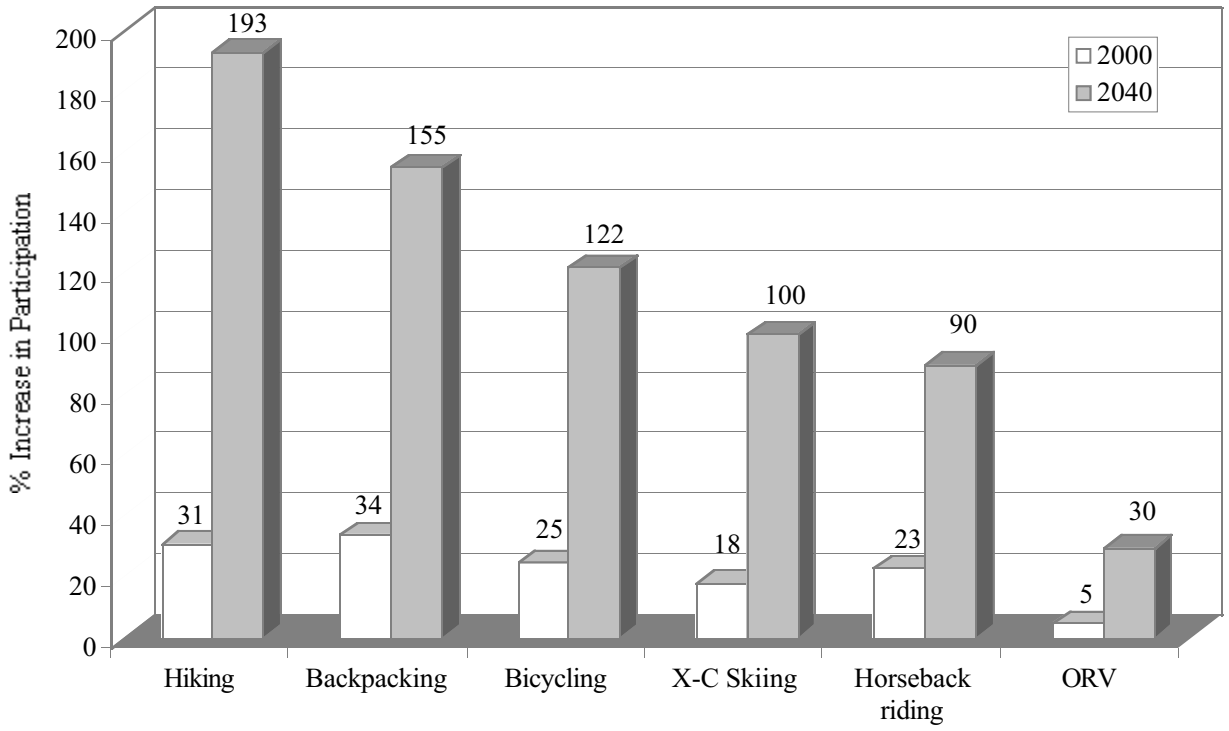
Finally, growing American interest in historic and cultural sites will have an impact on Montana tourism in general, as well as the state's trails. The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, in particular, has the likelihood of significantly increasing visitation to Montana, particularly at sites, trails, and waterways associated with the Expedition.

Montana Trail Use

Trail Use Participation Rates and Trends

Montana's trail system plays an important role in outdoor recreation in Montana, with 56 percent

Figure III-3. Projected National Participation Trends in Trail-related Activities.



(English 1993)

of adult Montanans using trails for a variety of activities. Based on 1998 FWP survey, 90 percent of Montana trail users participated in hiking, while other uses ranged from 11 percent for horseback riding to 2 percent for ATVs, 4X4s, and off-road motorcycling (FWP 1998—see Figure III-4).

According to an earlier FWP survey completed in the fall of 1994, over 70 percent of adult Montanans went dayhiking or walking for pleasure during the previous six-month period, by far the most popular type of trail-related activity in Montana (ITRR 1994b—see Figure III-5). After hiking and walking, rates of participation in other trail-related activities ranged from 20 percent for bicycling and 4x4 driving, to 9 percent for off-road motorcycling.

Visitors to Montana National Forests participate in trail-related activities in large numbers, with over 34 percent of Montana residents going on nature hikes or day hikes, and 6 percent mountain biking in 1990 (see Figure III-6). Resident visitors went backpacking, horseback riding, and off-road ORV riding at much lower rates, with 3 percent or less participation (Yuan and Hammond 1991). Visitors to Bureau of Land Management lands in Montana engaged in trail-related activities in large numbers also, with annual visits of over 873,000 for hiking and biking, and over 350,000 for ORV riding, in fiscal year 1997 (BLM 1997).

Most types of Montana trail activities have relatively similar levels of participation between males and females (ITRR 1994b). Backpacking, motorcycling, four-wheel driving, and snowmobiling, however, are activities which have clear male majorities in Montana (see Figure III-7). Walking, horseback riding, bicycling, cross-country skiing, and ATV riding have the highest female participation rates.

It is difficult to track Montana trail participation over time, because different studies have tended

Figure III-4. Percentage of Montana Trail Users Participating in Various Trail Activities.

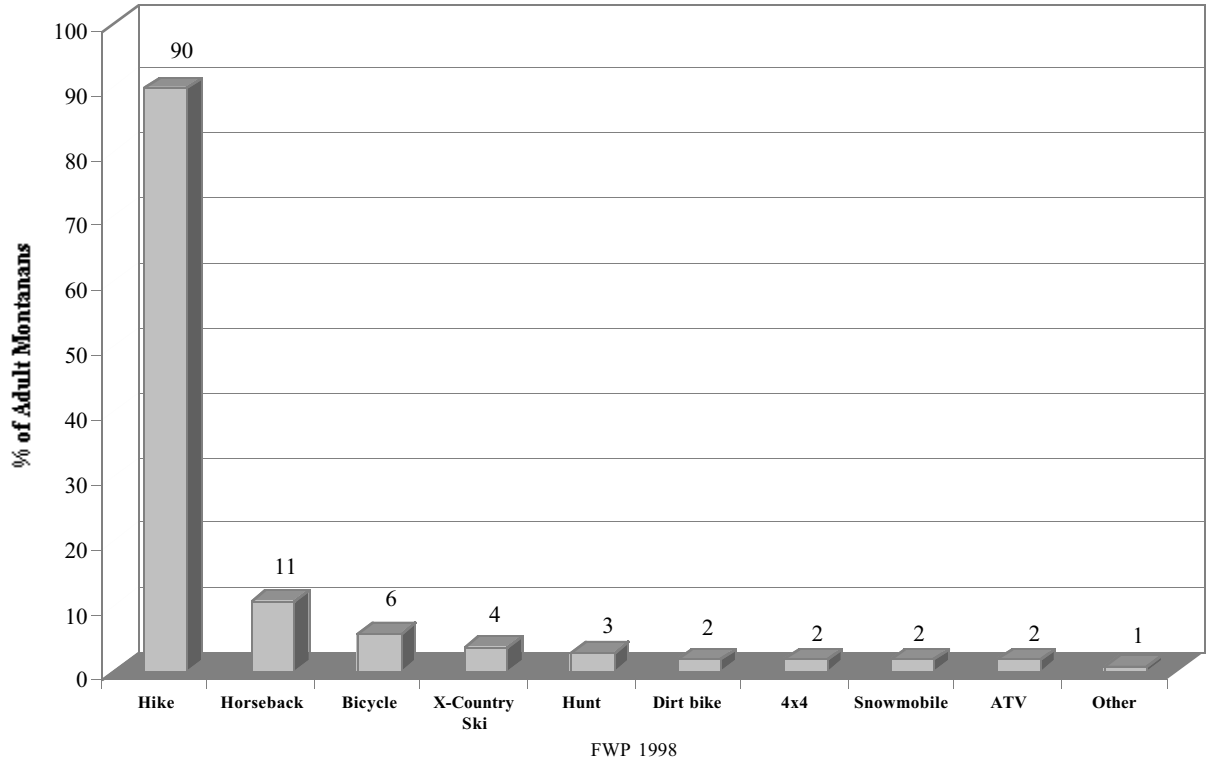


Figure III-5. Participation in Select Trail-Related Activities.

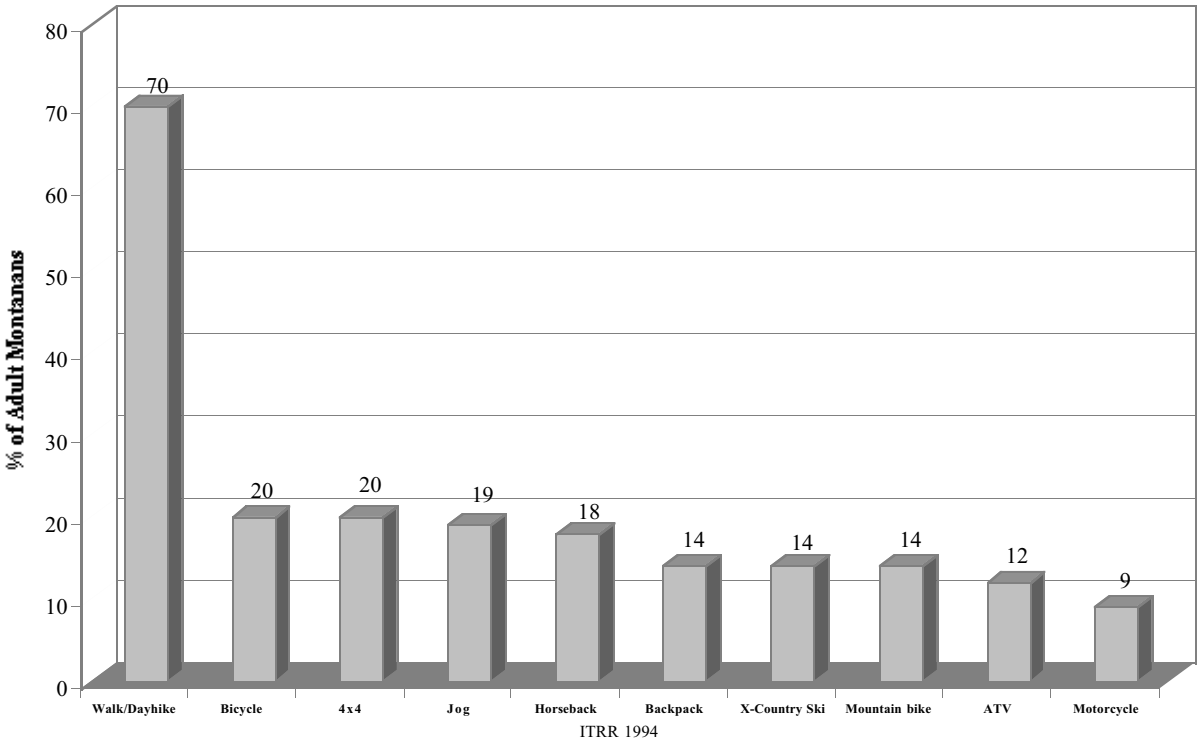
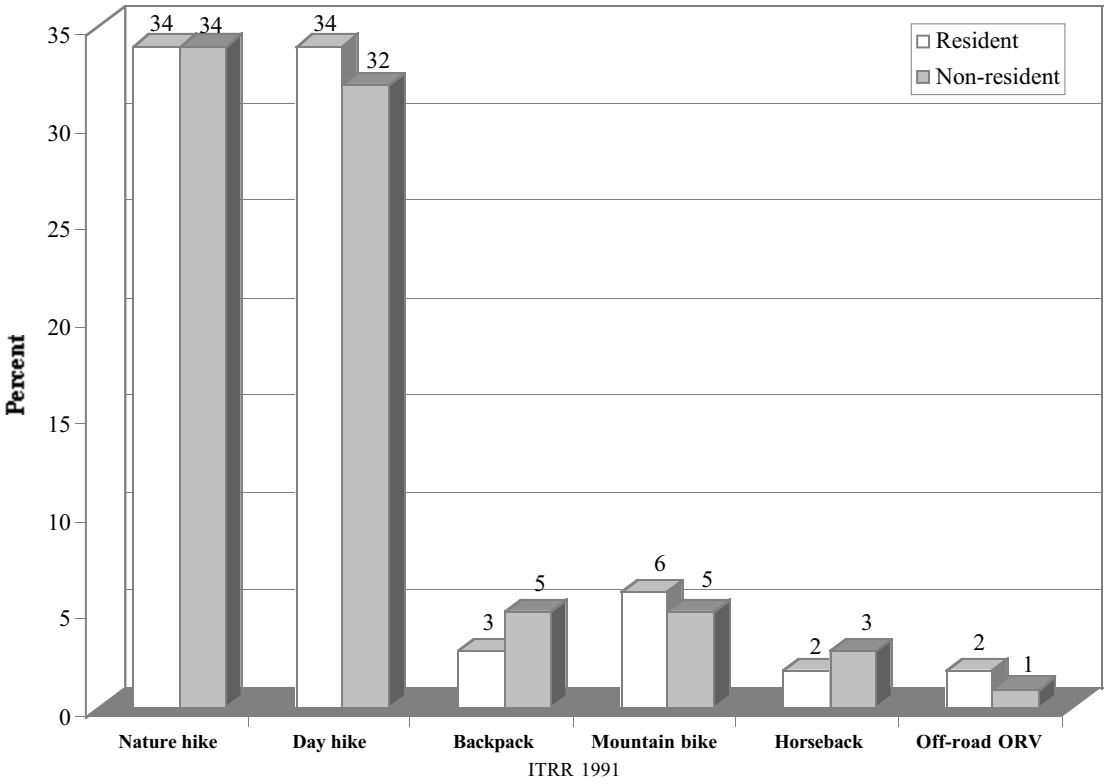
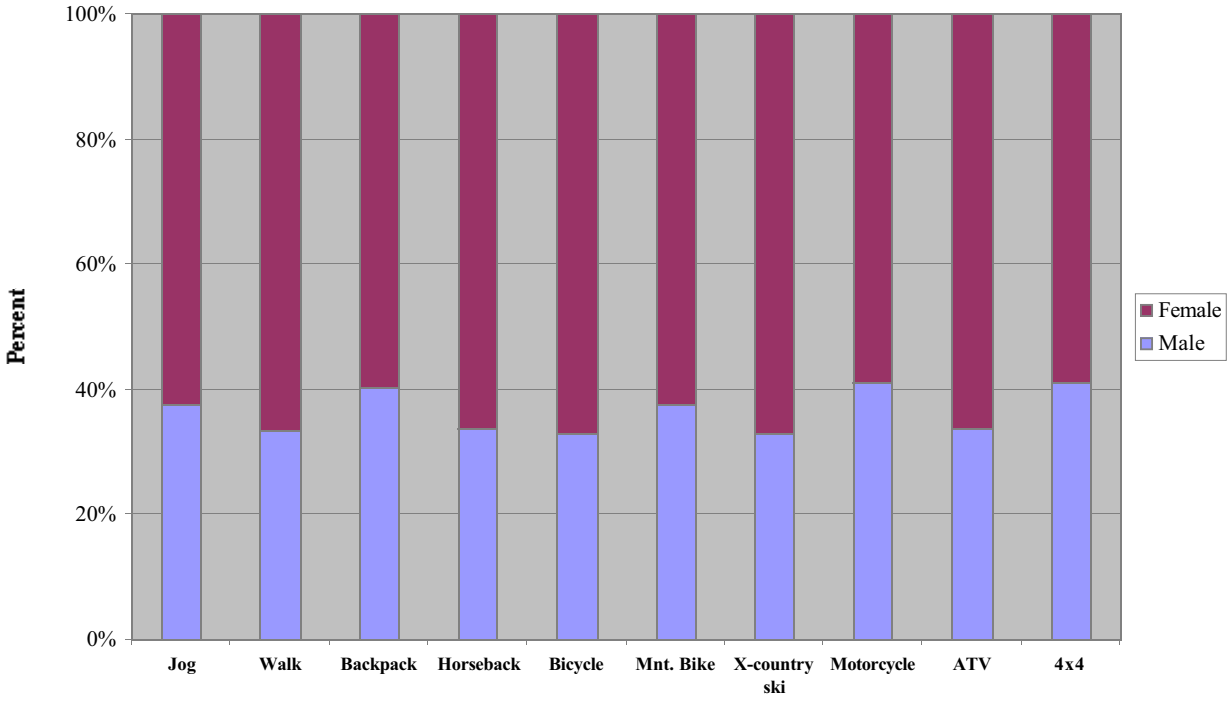


Figure III-6. Participation in Trail-Related Activities on Montana's National Forests.



ITRR 1991

Figure III-7. Participation Rates by Sex for Select Trail-Related Activities.



ITRR 1994b

to use different approaches, making comparisons difficult. Based on the limited information available, however, the following general trends were identified (FWP 1993):

- Participation in walking and hiking increased dramatically between the 1965 and 1988 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) study periods.

- Participation in bicycling increased between the 1965 and 1988 SCORP study periods, with the most substantial increases during the 1970s.

- Participation in snowmobiling and especially cross-country skiing increased between the 1983 and 1988 SCORP study periods.

- Participation in horseback riding increased during the 1965 to 1969 SCORP study periods, but declined during the 1970s and 1980s.

Because the last SCORP was done in 1993, more recent comparative information for these trail uses is not available.

Off-highway vehicle registration trends in Montana affirm the growing popularity of motorized trail activities (see Figure III-8). Between 1990 and 1998, Montana OHV registrations (including both ATVs and motorcycles) increased by 156 percent, rising from 7,399 to 18,953. According to Forest Service and BLM projections for Montana, registered OHVs will climb to 29,614 by the year 2005, and 36,272 by 2015, approximately twice the number in the late 1990s (DOA/DOI 2000b). A survey conducted by University of Montana researchers estimated that 100 percent of registered ATVs and 9 percent of registered motorcycles are used in off-highway situations (Sylvester 1995).

Truck registrations in Montana also increased between 1990 and 1998, although not nearly as dramatically as OHVs. During that period, registrations climbed 13 percent, rising from 268,466 to 304,696, with relatively modest increases projected through 2015 (DOA/DOI 2000b). According to the University of Montana, approximately 9 percent of trucks registered in Montana are used off-highway (Sylvester 1995).

There is little current information available about non-resident trail participation and trends in Montana. According to the University of Montana study mentioned earlier, day hiking and nature hiking were engaged in by 34 percent of non-resident visitors to Montana National Forests (ITRR 1991a). Backpacking and mountain biking were the next most popular trail-related activities, engaged in by 5 percent of non-resident visitors. A survey of visitors who entered the state on major highways in 1990 indicated that over fourteen percent of visitors intended to go hiking while in Montana (ITRR 1991b). Backpacking and horseback riding were the next most popular trail-related activities for summer visitors, each attracting one percent.

According to another University of Montana survey, nature and wildlife viewing are among the most popular reasons for visiting Montana, with mountains, rivers, lakes, open space, uncrowded areas, national forests, and national parks major attractions. Trails are an important component of these amenities, and play a significant role in both resident and visitor outdoor recreation. According to the survey, 15 percent of the respondents included hiking as a reason for visiting the state, while 8 percent indicated wilderness was part of the attraction (ITRR 1997—see Figure III-9). In general, the growing nationwide popularity of outdoor recreation, combined with increased non-resident visitation to Montana, suggests more non-resident use of Montana's trails in the future.

The average age of adult Montana trail users is concentrated in the late 30s and early 40s (see Figure III-10). Mountain biking had the youngest average age (36) while walking had the highest average age (45). Because the survey only included adult Montanans old enough to drive, the results do not reflect trail use patterns of younger people.

Figure III-8. Montana OHV Registration Trends.

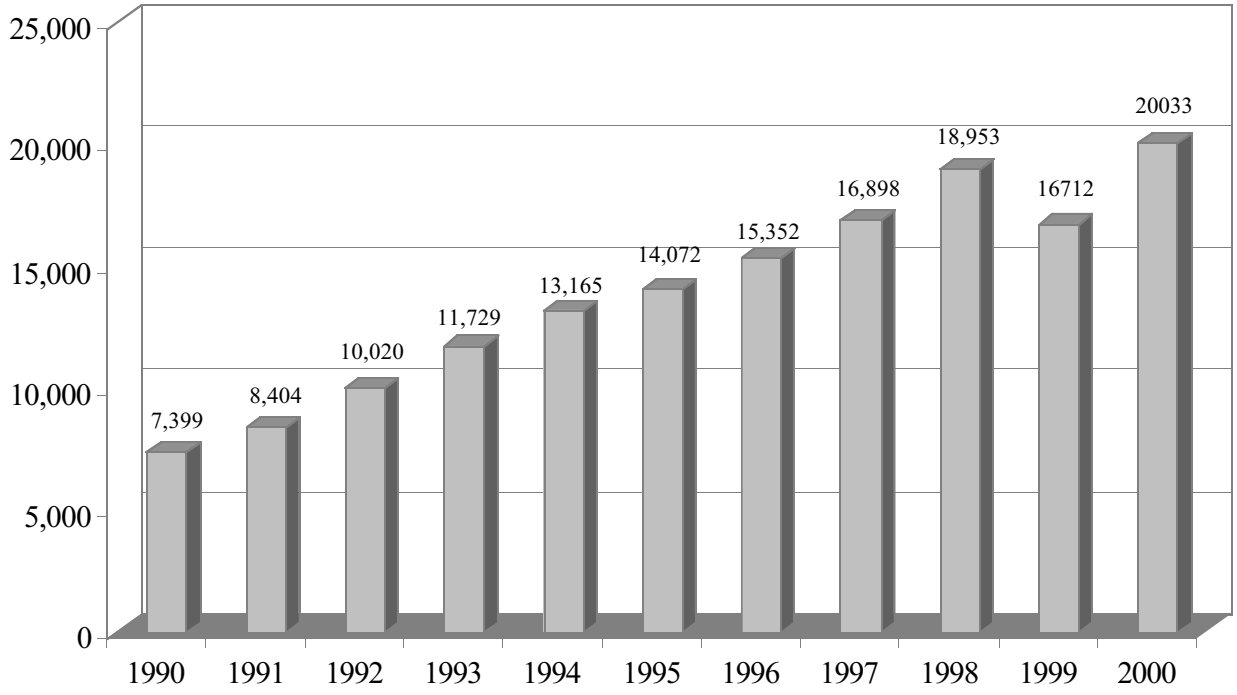


Figure III-9 . Summer Visitors Top 22 Reasons for Visiting Montana (1997).

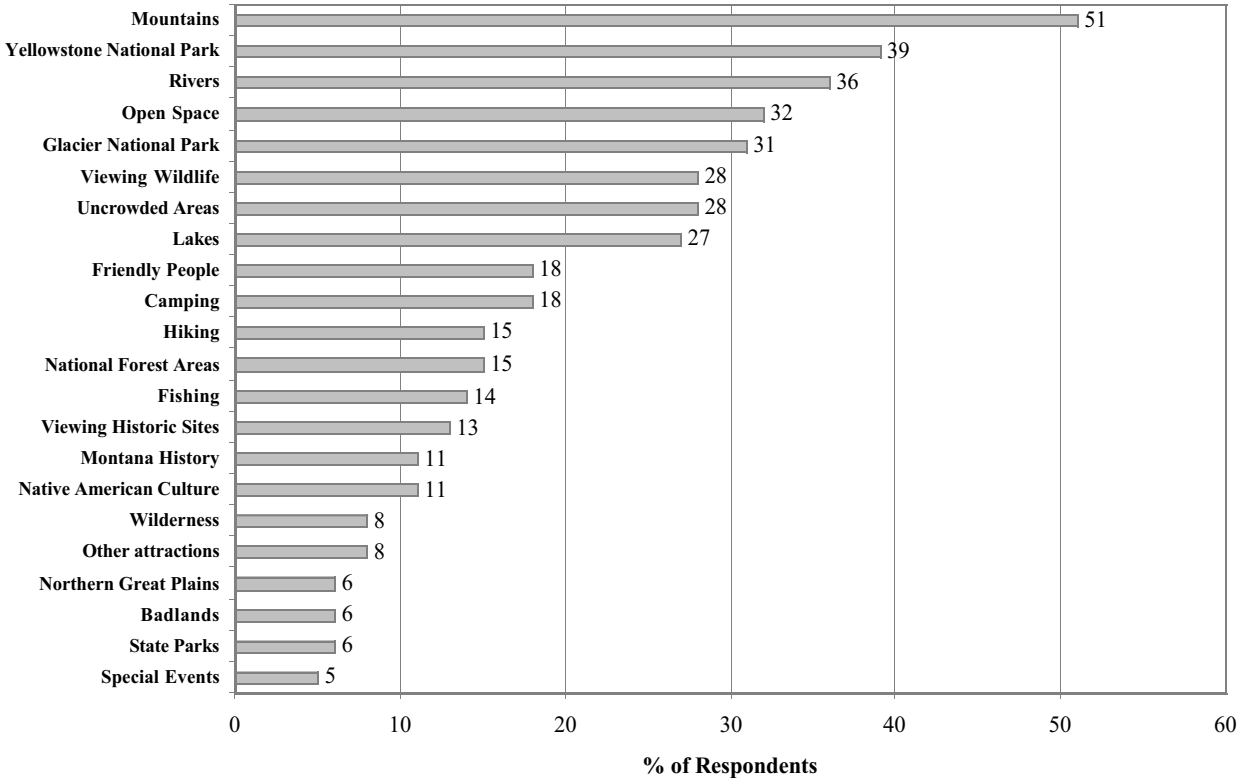
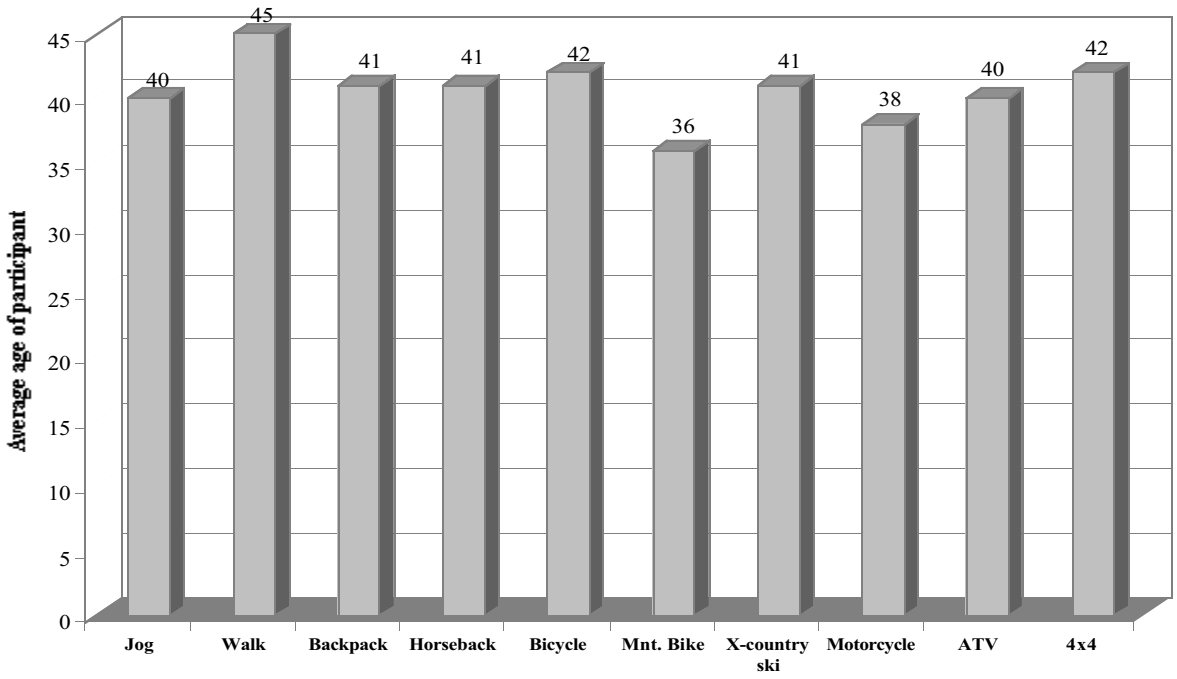


Figure III-10. Average Age of Participants.



ITRR 1994b

Trail Trip Profiles and Activity Days

Survey respondents reported that 78 percent of their trips were day trips, with 22 percent involving overnight stays, the median length of which was 2 days (ITRR 1994b). Trail users reported traveling a median of 14 miles to the trailhead, and a median distance of 6 miles on the trail trip.

Activity days, based on the average number of days spent engaging in a specific activity, is another way of examining statewide trail use. Activity days are important indicators of trail use, because an activity with only a small participation rate, for example, may be engaged in many days a year by those who do participate.

Some of the more specific information reported by particular types of trail users includes the following:

- **JOGGING:** Joggers reported a median of 20 days of participation (in Montana) during the previous 6 months, with an additional 5 days out of state. The average distance per outing was 2.5 miles.
- **WALKING/DAYHIKING:** This group reported an average of 19 in-state outings during the previous 6 months, with an additional 4.5 days out of state during the spring and summer. The average distance covered was 2.5 miles.
- **BACKPACKING:** Montanans who backpacked averaged approximately 4 days during the 6 months prior to the survey, with a median of 1 additional out-of-state day. The median spring-summer trip was 8 miles, with fall-winter trips being 5 miles.
- **HORSEBACK RIDING:** Horseback riders reported a median of 9 days during the previous 6 months pursuing their activity. During the spring and summer months, the median distance traveled was 10 miles, with 5.5 miles being reported for the fall and winter.
- **MOUNTAIN BIKING:** These users spent a median of 9 days during the 6 months prior to the survey in their activity. Mountain bikers traveled a median distance of 6 miles on each occasion.

- **BICYCLING:** Bicyclists spent a median of 11 days pursuing their activity during the spring and summer months, and 9 days during the fall and winter. The median distance traveled was 4 miles.

- **OFF-ROAD MOTORCYCLING:** Motorcyclists reported 9.5 days of participation during the previous 6 months. The median distance covered was 25 miles per outing.

- **ATVs:** ATV enthusiasts reported a median of 5 days of participation during the 6 month spring-summer period, with a median travel distance of 15 miles.

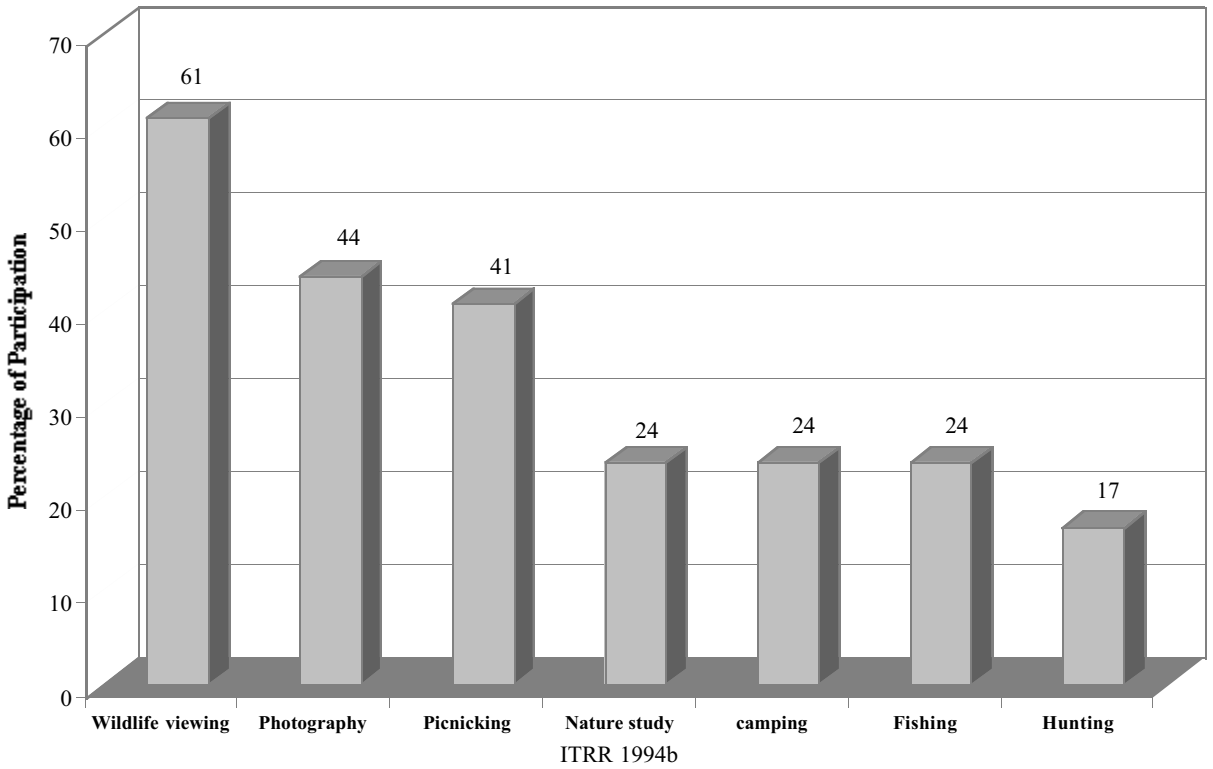
- **FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE VEHICLES:** four-wheel drivers reported 8 days during the spring-summer season, with a median distance traveled of 31 miles.

- **CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING:** Skiers reported 5.5 days of skiing during the 6 month survey period, with a median distance of 4.5 miles.

- **SNOWMOBILING:** Snowmobilers reported a median of 3 in-state days of activity during the survey period, with an additional day out of state. The median distance traveled was 27 miles.

The *Trail Users Study* also revealed that Montana trail users frequently combine trail trips with other types of outdoor recreational activities (see Figure III-11). In some cases, trail use might be the means to pursue another, more primary recreational end (e.g., packing into the backcountry to go elk hunting). The most frequently mentioned pursuit was wildlife viewing, mentioned by 61 percent of the summer trail users.

Figure III-11. Participation Rates in Other Activities When on a Trail Trip.



ITRR 1994b

Montana Trail User Attitudes

Major Conclusions from Surveys and Scoping Results

Trail users in Montana are concerned with a wide range of statewide and local trail issues, as indicated by various surveys and the written and scoping meeting comments (see Appendix). A number of major themes about trail use and attitudes are summarized below:

- Walking is the dominant form of trail activity by a significant margin. However, many people who walk also engage in other forms of trail activity.
- There is some support for more trails in Montana. Trails close to where most people live and rail-trails have strong support. The data also suggests support for more quiet non-motorized trails, although little support exists for single-use trails at this time.
- Most non-motorized trail users feel motorized trail use is incompatible with their use, with almost half of Montanans in general disapproving of even legal motorized trail use.
- Strong support exists for urban trails and utilizing old railways for trails.
- Maintaining current trail miles and access to trails, as well as increasing access, have widespread support.
- There is some sense of crowding on Montana trails, but it does not appear to have reached a severe level, at least from a statewide perspective.
- Montanans also have some concerns about conflicts on trails, but the problem has not yet reached a crisis level, at least from a statewide perspective. Most conflicts involve mechanized forms of trail use.
- Trail users reported a lack of inherent compatibility between motorized and non-motorized users. Generally, motorized users reported more compatibility with non-motorized users than visa versa.
- Montana trail users are concerned about poor trail etiquette, but generally feel other trail users follow proper trail etiquette.
- Montana trail users have a preference for more remote trails and dirt surfaces. Bicyclists, however, prefer asphalt. Motorized activities prefer dirt roads slightly more than trails. The majority of cross-country skiers prefer groomed trails.
- Better trail information is needed.
- There is support for making roads and highways safer for bicycling.
- Most trail users say they would prefer to get out more often, but are prevented from doing so mainly by time constraints.
- Significant differences exist between trail users in terms of how frequently they get out and how many miles they cover on a trip. Walkers and bicyclists tend to get out most frequently, while motorized tend to cover substantially more ground on an average trip.

The survey and scoping results reveal that while the state trail system currently provides excellent opportunities for a wide range of trail-related activities, as well as significant access opportunities to public land, the public perceives a number of shortcomings, including the need to maintain existing trails and accesses, and lack of trails near the larger urban areas. The data also suggests that trail use should not be looked at in isolation, but instead examined within a larger context of outdoor recreation activities often associated with trail use. Hunting, fishing, nature and wildlife viewing, or just traveling to natural areas, are popular activities for Montanans that often involve trail use (Environmental Quality Council 1996).

Motivation and Satisfaction

Montanans often use trails or engage in trail-related activities for a number of reasons. Hunting, fishing, and nature viewing are popular activities. At the same time, a number of factors motivate Montanans to engage in trail-related activities, with the basic desire to experience nature the most important (ITRR 1994b—see Figure III-12). Stress release and physical activity are also important motivating factors.

In general, trail users are satisfied with their trail experiences, with 96 percent of the 1994 survey respondents expressing some level of satisfaction, and 75 percent very satisfied (ITRR 1994b—see Figure III-13). However, as will be discussed below, Montanans are less satisfied with other aspects of trail use.

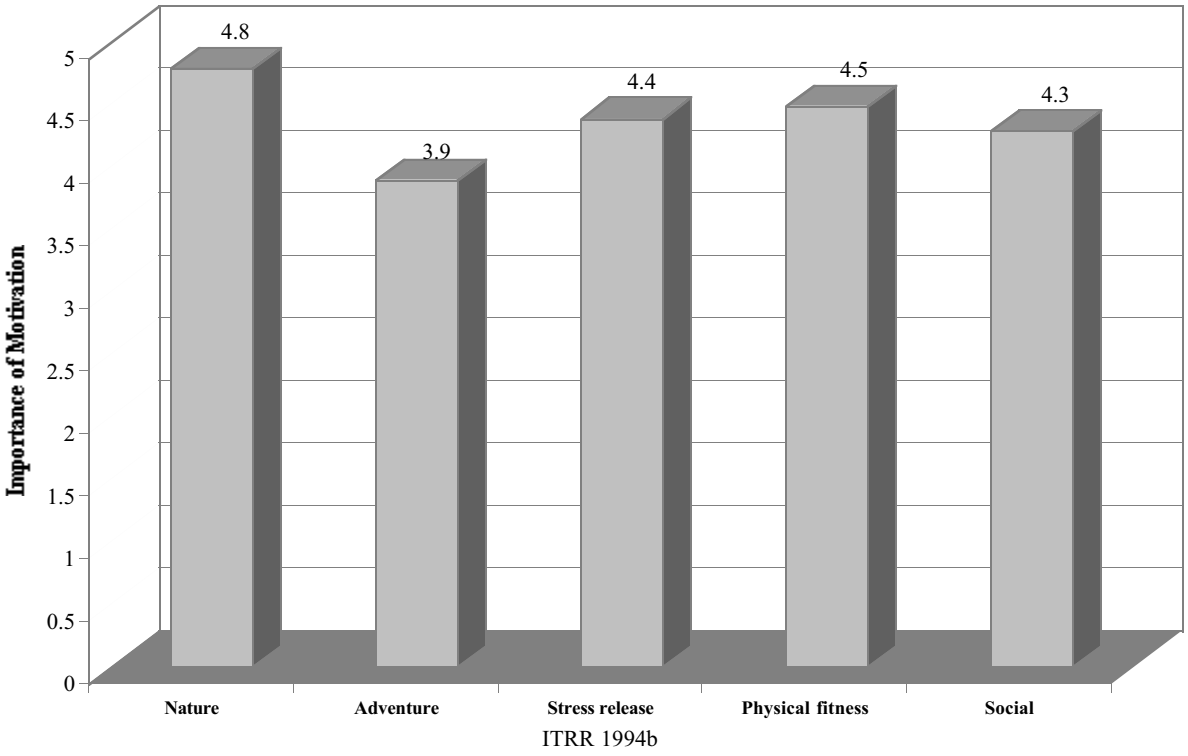
Attitudes about Trail Supply

Although only a small percentage of Montana trail users feel too many people are using their favorite trail, they generally feel that more trails are needed statewide, particularly near the communities where they live (ITRR 1994b). More widespread support seems to exist for maintaining existing trails and access, including maintaining allowed uses. Strong support also exists for increasing trails near urban areas, including quiet trails, and converting old railways into trails.

Overall, Montanans are satisfied with opportunities to use trails, with 85 percent expressing satisfaction (see Figure III-14). Only 24 percent of respondents agreed their favorite trail was too crowded, compared to 30 percent who disagreed (see Figure III-15).

Although Montanans are generally satisfied with opportunities to use trails, they also support additional trails; 21 percent of the respondents in the 1994 Montana Trail User Survey felt there were enough trails in the state, while 43 percent of the respondents felt there were not enough (see Figure III-16). Relatively high percentages (36 percent) were either neutral or didn't know.

Figure III-12. Motivating Factors for Engaging in Trail-Related Activities.



ITRR 1994b

Figure III-13. Trail User Satisfaction.

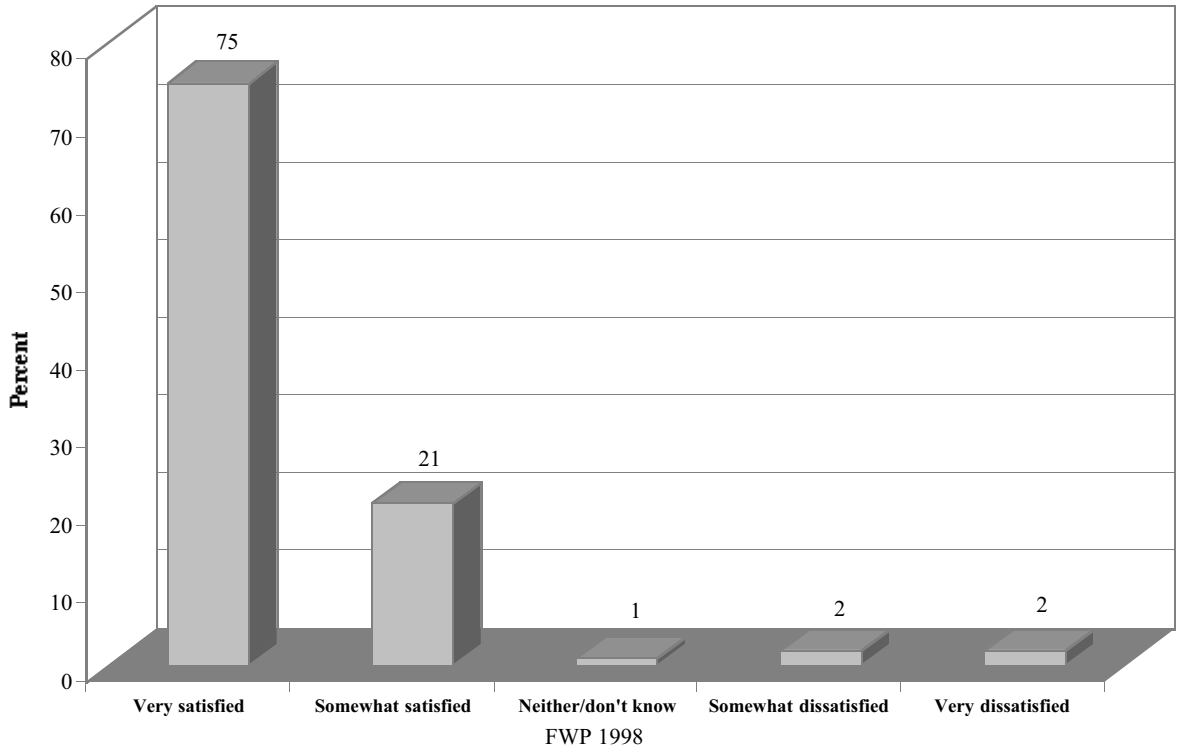


Figure III-14. Satisfaction with Trail Opportunities.

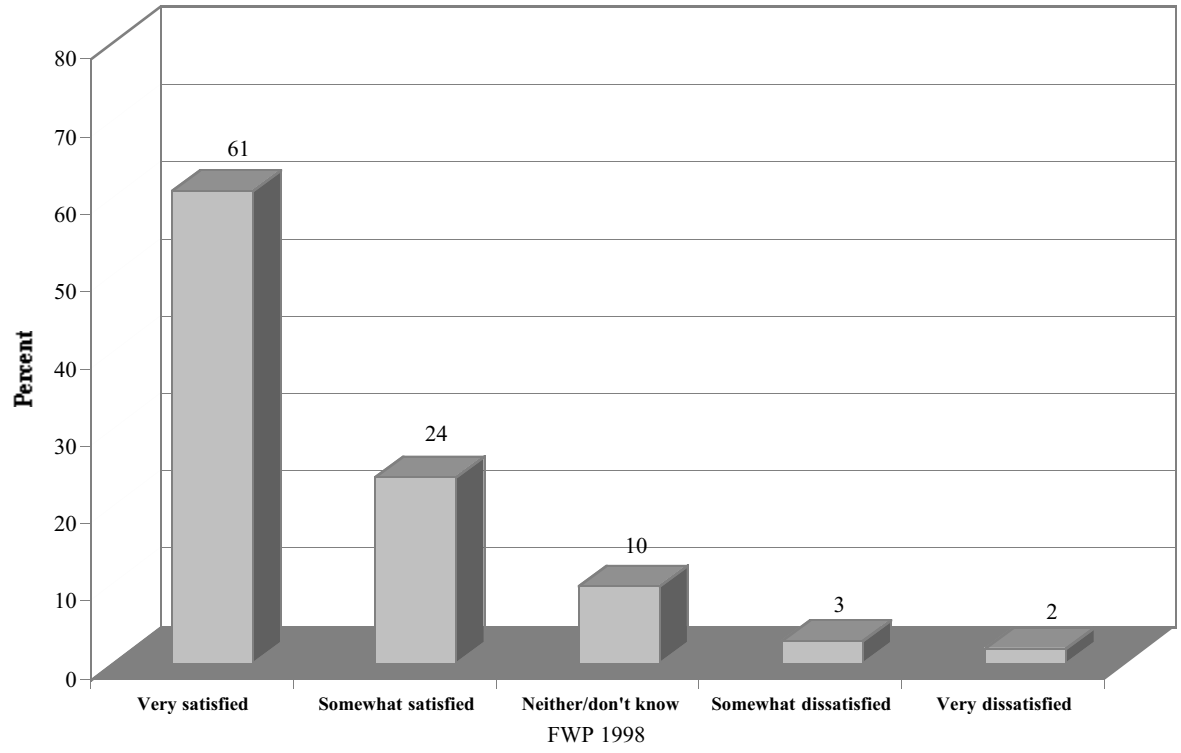


Figure III-15. Perception of Crowding on Favorite Trail.

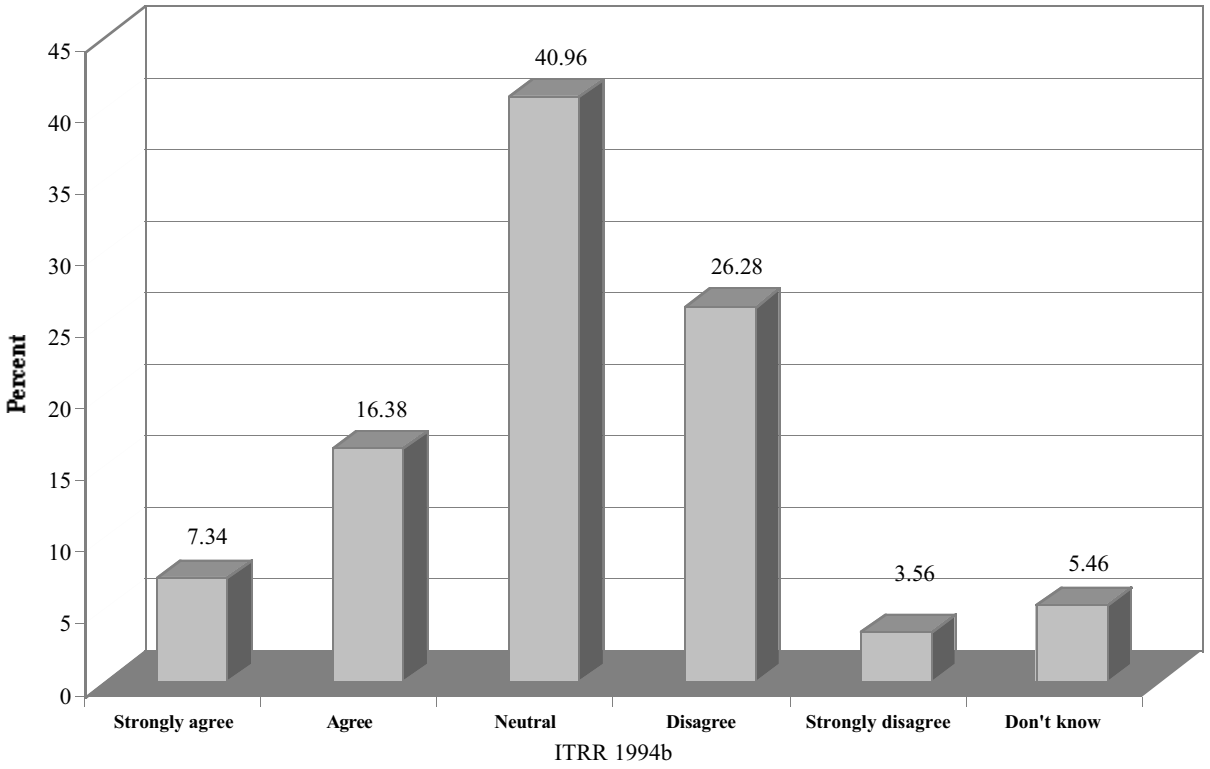
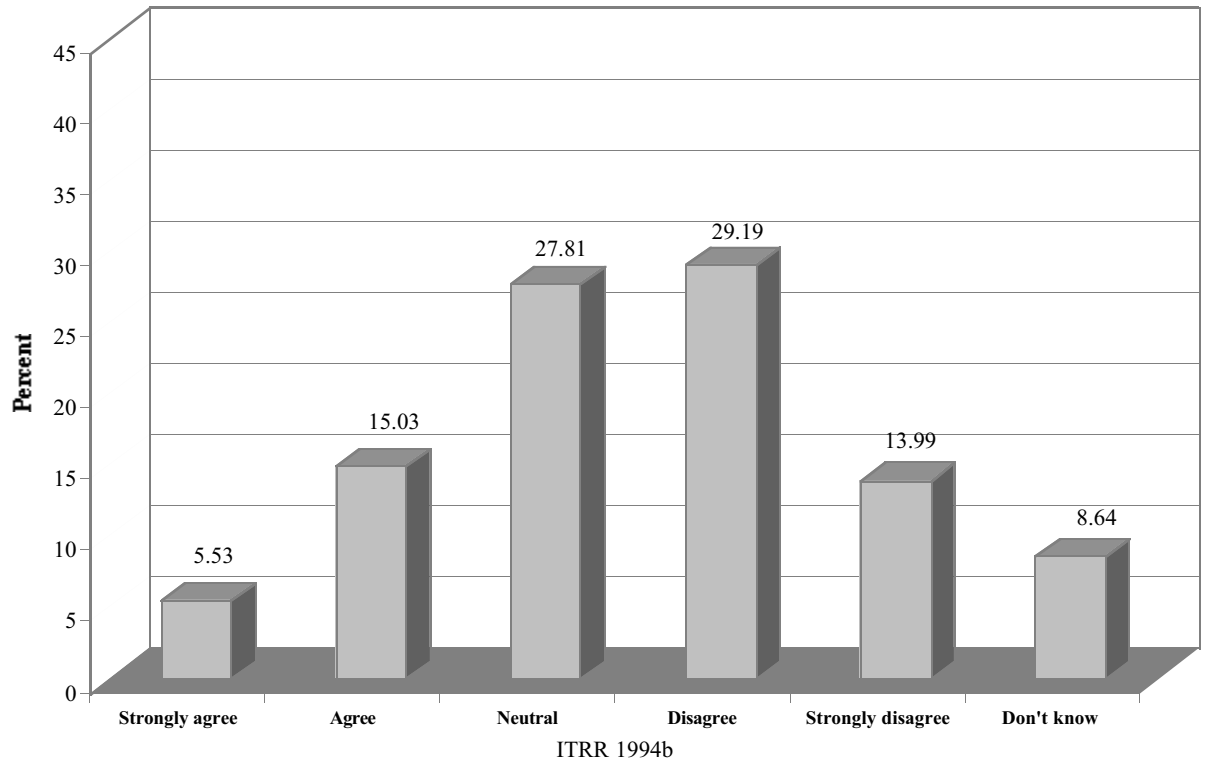


Figure III-16. Agreement that the Statewide Trail Supply is Adequate.



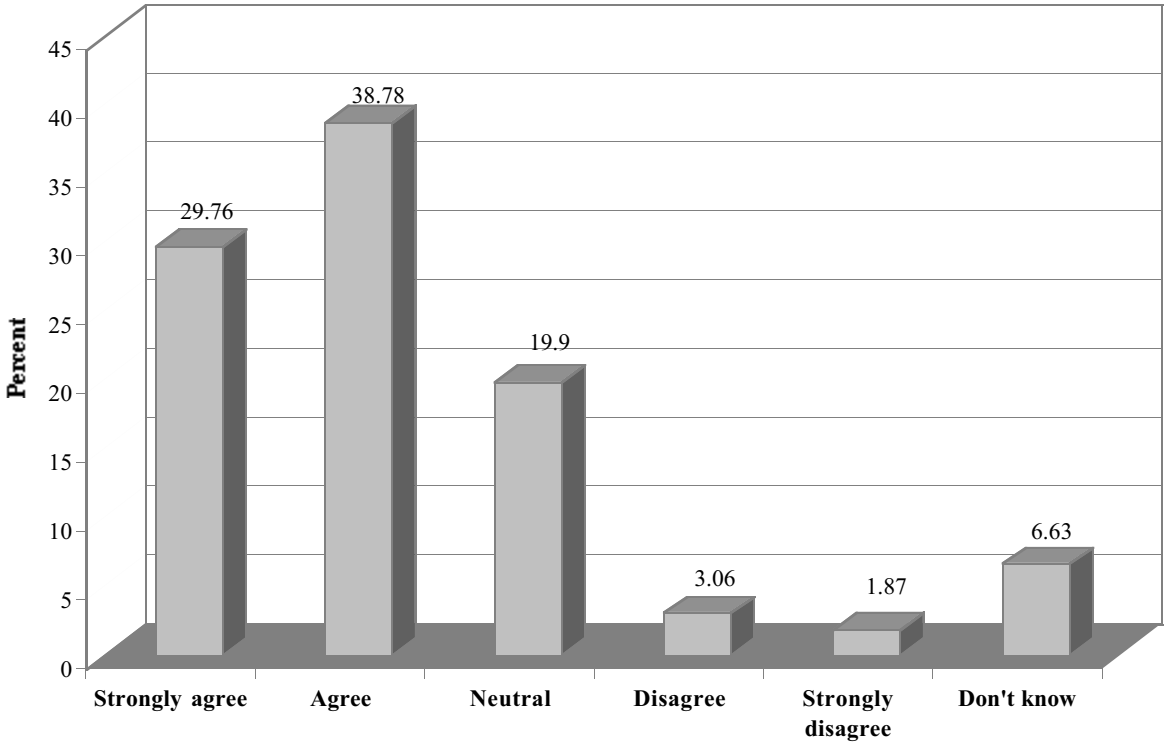
The 1993 Montana SCORP Plan also documented a need for more community trails in Montana (FWP 1993). As part of the Plan, a survey of local recreational facility needs was done in 1992. Survey data was compiled from seven large cities (Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Miles City, and Missoula). According to the survey, trails ranked third (after day use/picnicking and outdoor sports games) in terms of the number of additional facilities needed. Trails also ranked as the third most needed outdoor recreation facility in survey results tabulated for a selection of 20 Montana counties.

There was very strong support for using abandoned railroad grades as trails, with nearly 69 percentage of the respondents supported making more abandoned railroad grades into trails, while only 5 percent opposed doing so (see Figure III-17). Some states have converted hundreds of miles of abandoned rail grades into trails, but Montana has moved relatively slowly in this area. The survey results indicate support for a more aggressive program for developing railtrails.

Walking and hiking are permitted activities on all of Montana's trail mileage while other uses may face restrictions in various places and at different times. However, *The Summary of Written Scoping Comments* (FWP 1995b), which identified state and local trail issues as indicated by comments received from the public, listed quiet, non-motorized trails as the highest-priority. Of the 315 comments received during the scoping period, 216 pertained to this issue (see Appendix for more details). Alternatively, during the eighteen public scoping meetings held in cities throughout the state, trail closure was the most important issue, with strong support for keeping existing motorized trails open (FWP 1995a).

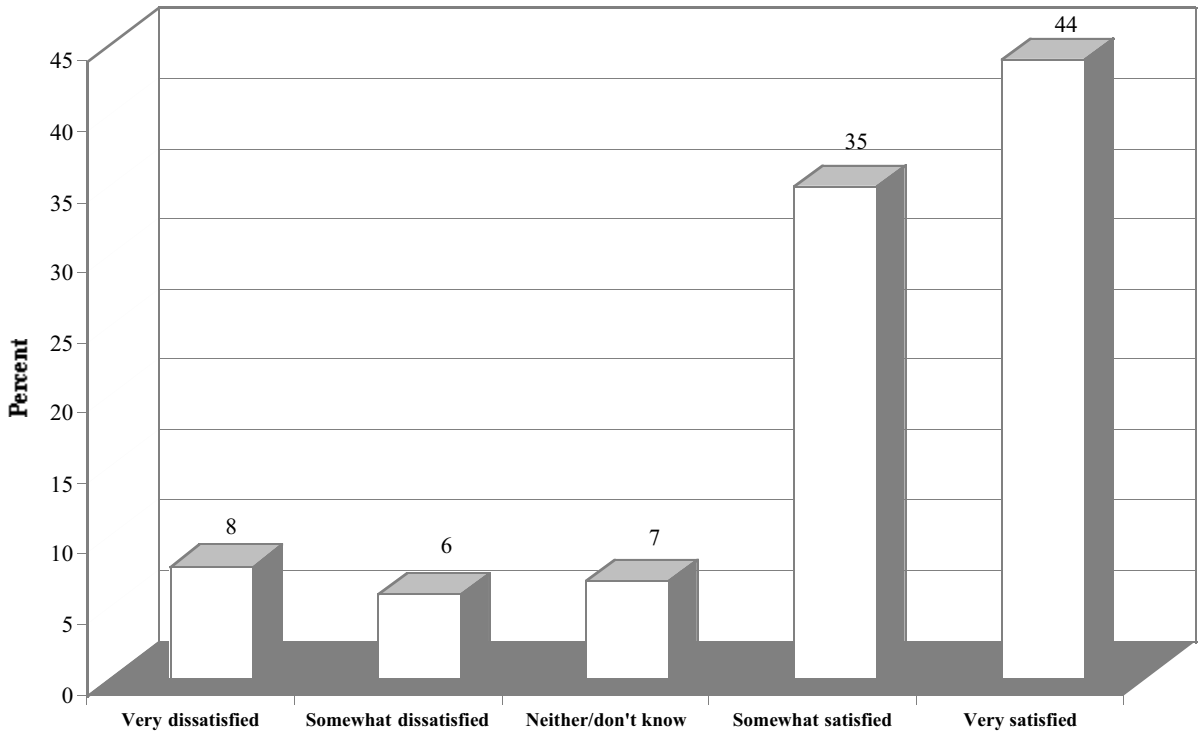
Although access to trails and public land is among the most significant issues to emerge from the scoping comments received for the trails plan, the FWP survey (1998) found Montana residents in general less concerned, with 14 percent dissatisfied with access to public land for recreation, compared with 79 percent satisfied (see Figure III-18).

Figure III-17. Extent of Support for Converting Abandoned Rail Lines into Trails.



ITRR 1994b

Figure III-18. Satisfaction with Trail Access.



(FWP 1998)

Attitudes about Trail Use and Management

Responses to 1994 trail user survey indicate that Montana trail users have some sense of being crowded while using trails, but from a statewide perspective the situation does not yet appear to be at a crisis level. As indicated above, approximately 24 percent of the respondents agreed that too many people are using their favorite trails. Alternatively, 30 percent disagreed. The remaining 46 percent were either neutral or had no opinion. The survey was not designed to identify particular trails or locations where there may be severe localized crowding.

The survey also indicated that Montana trail users are concerned about poor trail etiquette, with 51 percent of the respondents agreeing that this is a problem (see Figure III-19). Approximately 19 percent of the respondents felt improper trail etiquette wasn't a problem. According to the survey, 30 percent of the respondents were either neutral on the issue of etiquette, or didn't know if it was a problem.

Montana trail users are more interested in better trail information, with 55 percent of the respondents saying that information about trail locations could be improved. Only 19 percent of the respondents disagreed, with 26 percent saying they were neutral or didn't know (see Figure III-20).

The Montana Trail User Study also indicated that a majority of trail users (61 percent) supported making roads and highways safer for bicyclists. Only sixteen percent disagreed with this goal, with 23 percent of the respondents saying they were either neutral or didn't know (ITRR 1994b).

Figure III-19. Agreement that Trail Users Lack Proper Etiquette.

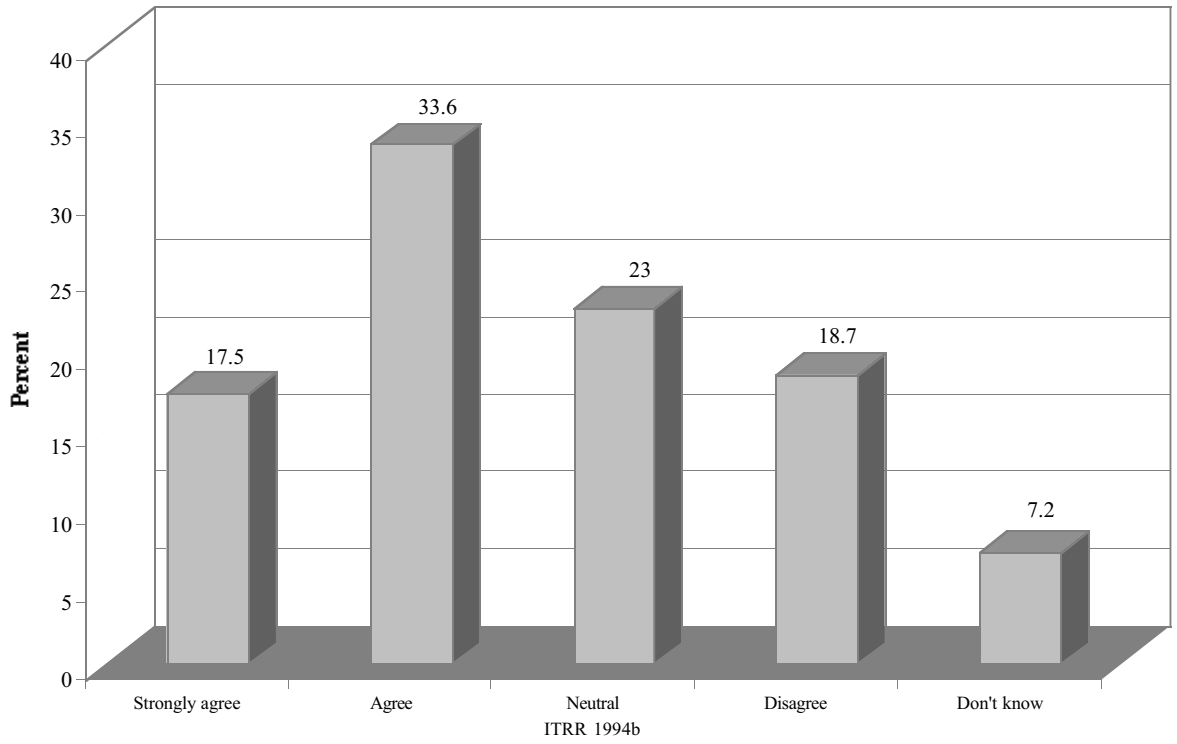
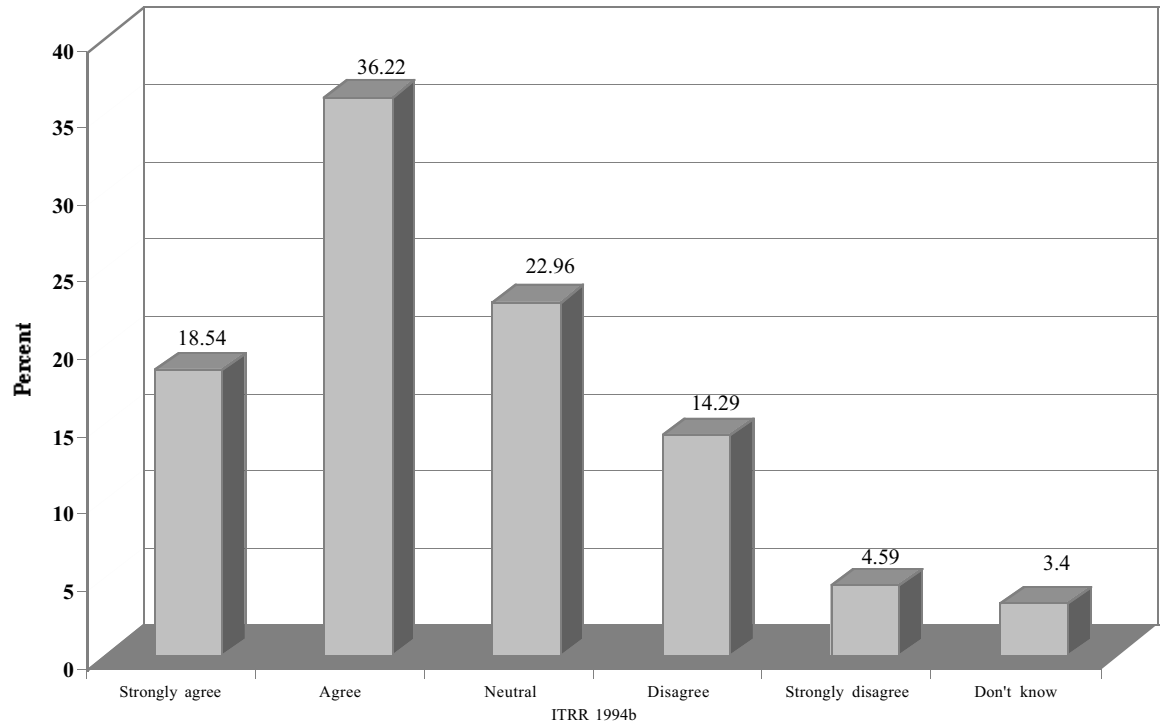


Figure III-20. Agreement that Better Trail Location Information is Needed.



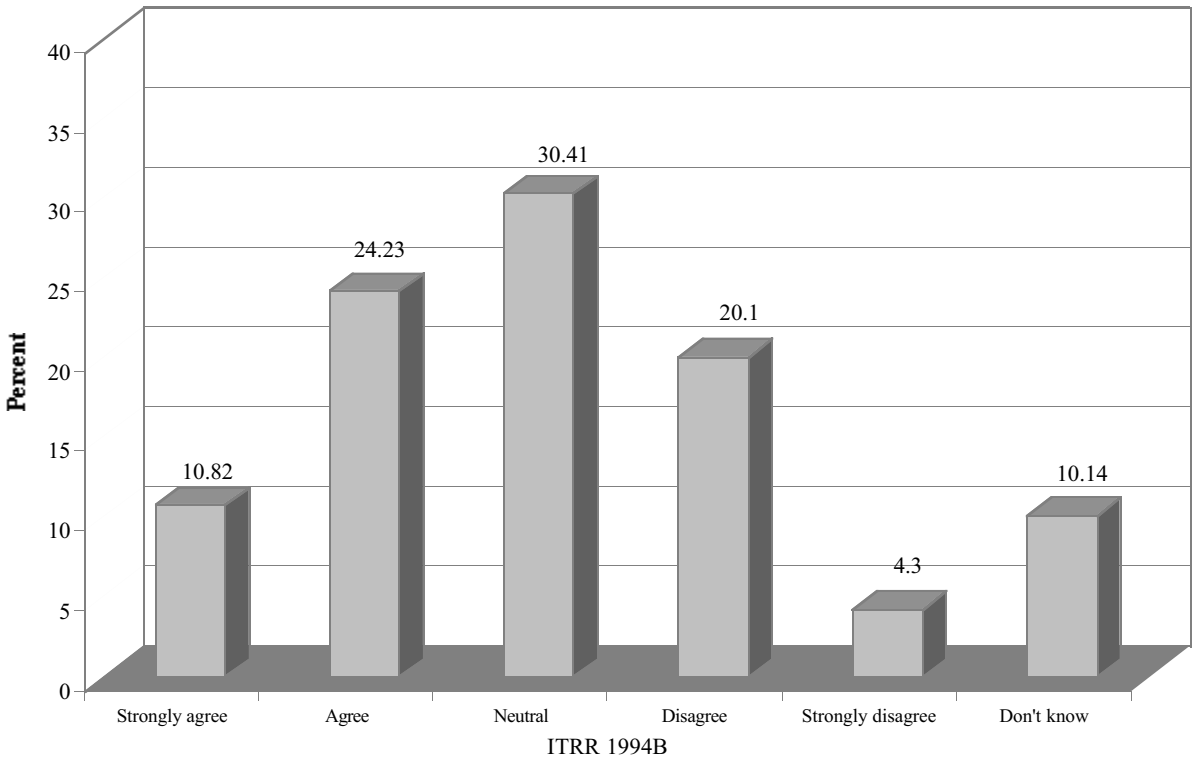
Attitudes about Conflict and Compatibility

Existing data also suggests that there is some concern about conflicts on trails, but not strong agreement on the severity of the problem (ITRR 1994b and FWP 1998). Over nine percent of the responding trail users reported experiencing some sort of conflict on their last trail trip. Of those reporting conflicts, nearly 80 percent said they involved mechanized forms of trail uses (this includes motorized and non-motorized uses such as mountain bikes). When asked if there are conflicting uses on local trails, 35 percent of the respondents agreed, with 24 percent disagreeing (see Figure III-21). Approximately 41 percent of the respondents were either neutral or didn't know. When asked if conflict on Montana trails was relatively minor, 45 percent agreed, 15 percent disagreed, while 40 percent had no opinion or did not know.

While opinions are relatively mixed on the present degree of conflict (perhaps due to the way the data was presented generally without a breakdown by use category), attitudes are more pronounced about what types of uses are perceived of as inherently incompatible. Survey results indicated that non-motorized users, in particular, do not find motorized uses to be compatible with their type of trail activities. Only twelve percent of the backpackers who responded, for example, felt motorcycles or four-wheel vehicles were compatible with their types of trail activity. Of the various non-motorized users surveyed, the percentage that felt a particular type of motorized use was compatible with their activity never climbed above 25 percent.

Horseback riders generally feel non-mechanized trail use is compatible and mechanized use incompatible, with only 33 percent of the horseback riders, for example, rating mountain biking as being compatible with their sport (compared to 72 percent for walking). Motorized vehicles were judged to be even less compatible with horses than mountain bikes, with a rating in the sixteen to eighteen percent range. Conversely, 41 percent of the mountain bikers judged horseback riding as being compatible. The relative speed of

Figure III-21. Agreement that there are Conflicting Uses on Local Trails.



mountain bikes and motorized vehicles and the chance of surprising trail stock were probably concerns that contributed to this assessment. Other non-motorized uses view motorized uses as incompatible

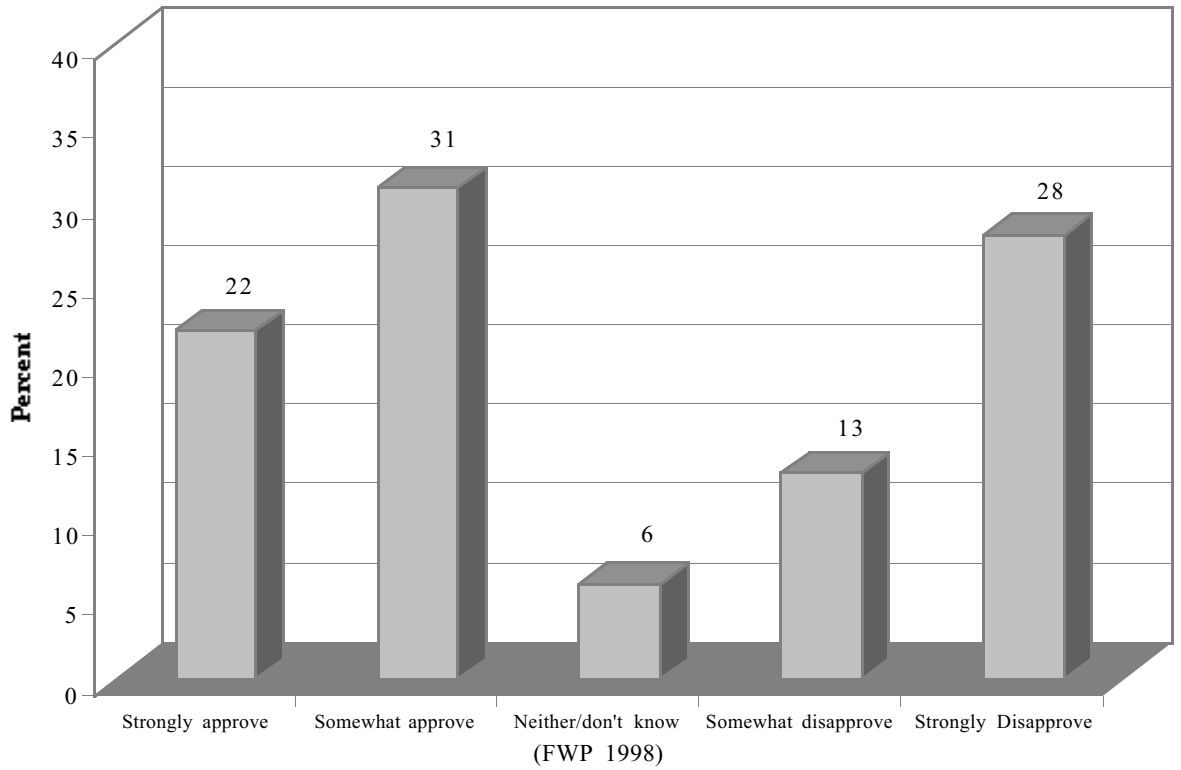
In a break from the overall trend, cross country skiers were more likely to find snowmobiling compatible with their activity than visa versa; approximately 25 percent of the skiers felt snowmobiling was a compatible activity. Interestingly, snowmobilers tended to view their sport as relatively incompatible with cross-country skiing; less than thirteen percent of snowmobilers said cross-country skiing was compatible.

Based on the available data, a large majority of non-motorized users feel that motorized use was incompatible with their trail use. When Montanans were asked if they approved of legal motorized trail use, 28 percent strongly disapproved, and 13 percent disapproved. On the other hand, 22 percent strongly approved and 31 percent somewhat approved, with only six percent having no opinion (see Figure III-22). Clearly, Montanans have strong and divided opinions on motorized trail use.

Motorized users, on the other hand, regarded other types of motorized trail use as compatible with their activities, while those that felt non-motorized uses were compatible generally ranged from 25 to 50 percent. With off-road motorcyclists and ATV users, for example, the percentage stating that a particular non-motorized use was compatible with their activity never slipped below 25 percent, and went as high as 56 percent.

Montana trail users appear to have mixed feelings about the desirability of single-use trails. According to the 1994 Montana Trail User Survey, although twice as many people see the need for single use trails (33 percent) than feel there are too many (16 percent), 51 percent said they didn't know or were neutral. When the issue was framed in a different manner, 22 percent of the respondents said they had a preference for single-use trails. On the other hand, 39 percent said they didn't have a preference for single use trails,

Figure III-22. Approval of Legal Motorized Trail Use.



with 39 percent saying they either didn't know or were neutral.

While conflicts between trail users do not appear to be especially severe when examined from a statewide perspective, the perceived lack of compatibility between motorized and non-motorized users, in particular, suggests a potential for much greater conflict in the future if use increases and trail supply and management remain relatively constant. In Montana, the expressed lack of compatibility between motorized and non-motorized trail users has likely not led to greater conflicts in part due to the state's numerous trail opportunities and low population.

Barriers to Trail Use

Barriers to additional trail use was also an issue addressed in the trail user survey (ITRR 1994b). A majority of respondents in every use category except one indicated that they would like to engage in their preferred activity more frequently. Jogging was the only category where less than half (34 percent) of the respondents wished they could get out more often. Among the other users, responses ranged from 89 percent for cross-country skiers to 57 percent for four-wheel enthusiasts.

Lack of time and work obligations were by far the most common barriers to additional participation mentioned by trail users. Weather was listed as a barrier for joggers, walkers/hikers, backpackers, horseback riders, bicyclists, and cross-country skiers. Not owning the necessary equipment (e.g., horse, snowmobile, etc.) was another factor mentioned by horseback riders, mountain bikers, ATV riders, four-wheel riders, and snowmobilers. Access restrictions or lack of trails was mentioned as a barrier to further use by mountain bikers, bicyclists, motorcyclists, ATV riders, and four-wheelers. Disabilities, traffic congestion, and lack of money were also mentioned by some users as factors preventing more active participation.

The survey data suggests that for the majority of trail users restrictions on available time such as work and family obligations are the primary obstacles to further use. Developing better trail opportunities close to the cities and towns where most Montanans live is one way of addressing what appears to be a fairly serious time constraint. More people could realize their goal of more frequent trail use if they could reduce the amount of time and the cost required for transportation to trailheads.

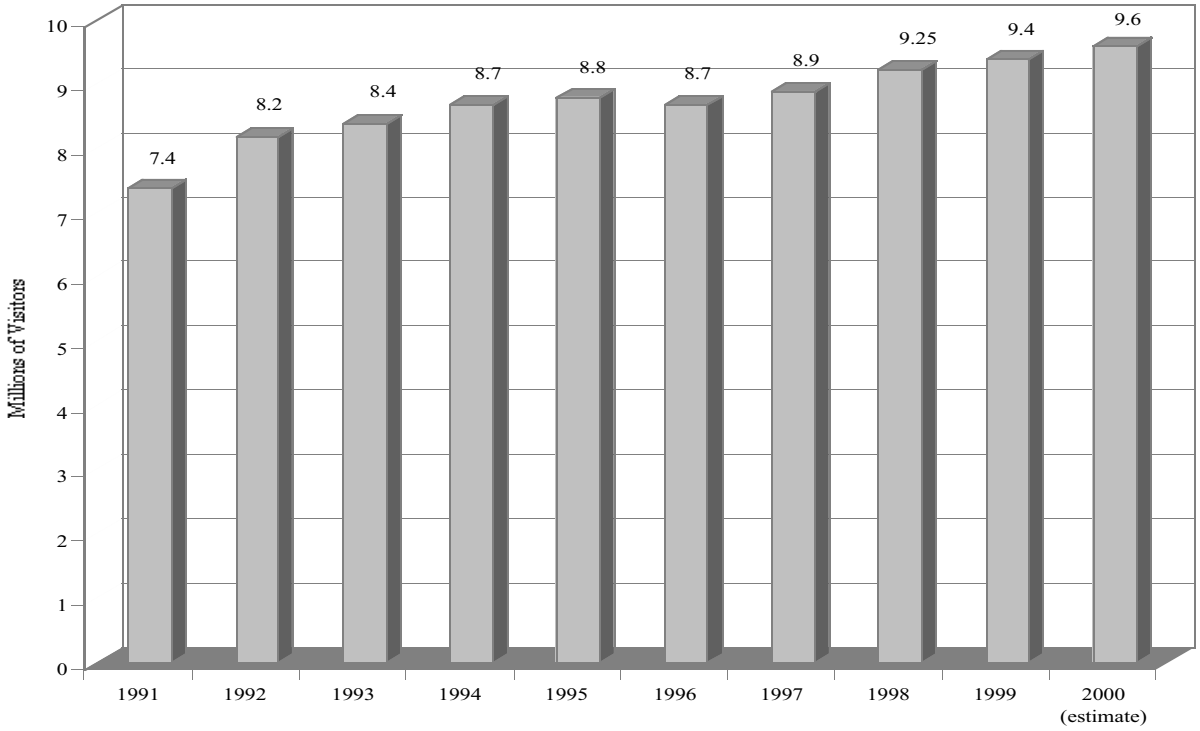
Summary of Montana Trail Supply and Demand

Montana's trail supply has not kept pace with increased use. Overall trail use in Montana grew in the 1990s, although participation rates remained relatively stable in many categories. Montana's population increased from 787,000 in 1980 to 800,000 in 1990, an increase of over one percent per year (Environmental Quality Council 1996). By 1995 Montana's population was 870,000, with an accelerated growth rate of over eight percent in five years. By the early part of the twenty-first century, it is estimated the state will have over a million residents. Combined with increases in population, the number of tourists in Montana increased dramatically since the mid-1980s, with more than nine million visitors annually by 1998 (ITRR 1999, see Figure III-23).

Future trends for Montana's trail system include increased use, expanding types of trail activities, and enhanced potential for conflict. Demands for greater levels of maintenance and management by the public will likely increase, as will the demand for more trails. This will be aggravated by new types of trail uses that increase the complexity of multiple-use management.

Increased crowding, conflict, and degradation of highly used trails could result in a secondary impact of increased use on other trails. The preference for primitive settings by many trail

Figure III-23. Montana Visitor Trends



(ITRR 2001)

users will also lead to increased use of more remote and less accessible trails. Whereas in the past many trails remained non-motorized due to physical landscape barriers, with modern technology these barriers are increasingly surmountable, requiring new management responses. Also, the rapid development and marketing of new trail technologies can create trail impacts and raise other management problems very rapidly. Innovative new management, public involvement efforts, funding programs, and volunteer efforts will be necessary to address these issues in the future.

The most critical need is for more non-motorized trails in and around Montana's growing urban areas, where most people live. Increased interest in and funding for urban trails during the past decade has produced some spectacular new opportunities in Montana's larger cities, a trend which has occurred throughout the country. However, the demand for more urban trails is expected to continue, as these are the routes that are most accessible to the majority of users.

While urban trails are the opportunities that are most readily available to the majority of trail users, backcountry trails are a key part of what makes Montana's trail system special. However, the supply of trails in Montana's roadless areas has decreased significantly during the past half century. Although the Forest Service—as well as other federal, state and local governing agencies—has created new trails and accesses in response to public demand, trail creation has been eclipsed by the loss of existing backcountry trails.

Finally, population growth and changing land use patterns have increased property values, subdivision, and suburban sprawl, resulting in a decrease of unofficial trails and access to trails across private land. In particular, the sale and subdivision of timber company land (e.g., Plum Creek property in northwestern Montana) has significantly decreased the amount of privately owned trail opportunities for the public. Trail access and private property issues will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.